

Professional imprudence puts lives at risk

Clarke Communication and Consulting

International health authorities recently reported the importation of a rabid pup from Morocco via Spain into the Netherlands that put a significant number of people at risk of contracting rabies. Although an ocean away, the international incident accentuates both the importance and need for animal health protocols as they apply to the international movement of animals, including pets. The omission is also a pertinent reminder of the critical role veterinarians play in negating unnecessary risk to zoonotic disease by ensuring adherence to regulations and a source of common sense counsel to clients they serve.

In February 2012 a rabid pup was imported into Amsterdam, the Netherlands, from Morocco via Spain. On 28 January 2012, a Dutch couple residing in Morocco obtained an 8-week old puppy from a street vendor. They took the dog to a local veterinarian who micro-chipped the dog and issued a certificate of good health. No vaccinations were given. The couple travelled by car and ferry from Morocco to Spain where they were casually issued a European pet passport by a veterinary clinic. Three days later they returned to the Netherlands by air. Three customs officers cuddled the dog at Malaga Airport, yet failed to examine the pet passport. The pet passport also escaped examination in the Netherlands.

Upon arrival at home the couple immediately introduced the puppy to friends and family. Initially, the pup behaved normally but became increasingly aggressive. The owners contacted a veterinarian after being bitten by the dog. The veterinarian attributed the aggressiveness to stress and prescribed a sedative. The dog's condition steadily deteriorated and it was only after the attending veterinarian discovered the dog's origin that rabies was considered and public health officials notified. The pup was euthanized and rabies confirmed by a diagnostic laboratory.

This is the first case of classical rabies in the Netherlands since 1988. The accidental import of a rabid puppy led to a resource-intensive and costly public health response. A total of 48 known contacts, including nine children, in three countries needed to be traced, of whom 45 required post-exposure rabies prophylaxis. A total of three animals were euthanised.

It was regrettable a Moroccan veterinarian failed to appropriately advise the new pet owners about protocol, that a Spanish veterinarian would incorrectly issue a European pet passport without regard to regulations governing vaccination and quarantine, and that customs officials at 3 locations failed to check the vaccination status of the dog.

Source: Global Animal Health – International Disease Monitoring